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Secret

OFFICE OF
NATIONAL ESTIMATES

MEMORANDUM

What the Chinese Communists are up to in Black Africa

Secret
23 March 1971

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

OFFICE OF NATIONAL ESTIMATES

23 March 1971

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: What the Chinese Communists are up to in Black Africa*

NOTE

This memorandum has been undertaken because the subject has not been given a comprehensive intelligence analysis in recent years and because open literature on Peking's activities in Africa has often tended to exaggerate Chinese capabilities and to portray its intentions in overly ominous tones. We attempt here to provide a balanced assessment and to lay out some parameters for the future.

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* *This memorandum was prepared by the Office of National Estimates and coordinated within CIA.*

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MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT: What the Chinese Communists are up to in Black Africa

I. CHINESE POLICY OBJECTIVES

1. After several years of neglect, Peking is showing a renewed interest in Black Africa. The Chinese are again offering aid, bidding for diplomatic recognition, and throwing lavish receptions for visiting African delegations. The current initiative suggests that China's leaders attach considerable importance to their relations with Sub-Saharan Africa -- if not for its intrinsic worth (if you "win" Black Africa, what have you won?), then as a place where easy points can be made in pursuit of larger objectives lying outside Africa.

2. One purpose of Chinese activity in Africa has been to affirm the regime's revolutionary image at home and abroad. In Black Africa, Peking's call for revolutionary struggle against colonialism and imperialism could be made credible with direct action: the arming and training of national liberation groups,

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support to those new regimes deemed truly revolutionary, and aid to political dissidents in "reactionary" Black African states. Such a radical and uncompromising program distinguished Peking's policy toward revolution from the more moderate "revisionist" line taken by Moscow. Initially the Chinese were supporting subversive action against some of the regimes that the Russians were courting, including Kenya, Ethiopia, Cameroon, and Uganda, among others.

3. Closely related to China's revolutionary self-image is its use of Black Africa as a safe and fruitful ground on which to arouse hostility toward the US and the USSR. Peking has consistently sought to identify these two powers as Africa's main enemies, together conspiring to prevent the total liberation of Africa. China's African friends are urged to shake off their imperialist fetters, repulse American and Soviet attempts to subvert their revolutionary gains, and get on with the revolution. In addition the Chinese have challenged the Soviet model of economic development as being unsuited to African conditions. Peking's leaders thus measure their success in Black Africa

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partially in terms of US and Soviet reverses.* When a US firm is nationalized, or when an African leader adopts Maoist slogans, it brings joy to the People's Palace; for these are seen as small but significant gains in a protracted struggle to reduce the global clout of the two super powers and to bring to China the international respect and stature to which it feels entitled.

4. But there are immediate and more tangible objectives as well. In Peking's current campaign to gain broad recognition and support, its greatest successes -- numerically at least -- have been in Africa. Even so unpromising a state as Equatorial Guinea has a vote in the UN General Assembly and can take a position favorable to Peking on such issues as nuclear non-proliferation and Chinese representation in the UN. Moreover, future gains for Peking may well mean some losses for Taiwan: Ghana, which has relations with neither regime, is considering the

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* *The Russians, who saw the Chinese preempt Soviet influence in Mali in the mid-1960s and lead the Keita regime on a radical and self-destructive course, acknowledge that Peking's policies have undermined Soviet influence. The USSR condemns "Mao and his group" for pursuing irresponsible and adventurist policies. In particular they are charged with ignoring political and economic realities in individual states; with promoting indiscriminate African acceptance of the Chinese model; and with setting Africa against the USSR and the rest of the socialist camp.*

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re-establishment of formal ties with Peking, and there are believed to be internal pressures in at least a couple of other states (e.g., Burundi, Sierra Leone) for extending recognition to the mainland regime. To the Chinese Peoples' Republic (CPR) leaders -- whose options in Asia have long been limited by US and Soviet power, whose links to Europe have developed slowly, and whose internal political convulsions have evoked the world's scorn -- the recent advances in Africa are seen as significant steps in overcoming Peking's international isolation.

II. POLICY INSTRUMENTS

A. Aid to Revolutionary Groups

5. China's commitment to global revolutionary struggle has found active expression in its support of African liberation movements directed against the white minority-run areas in southern Africa: Angola, Mozambique, Rhodesia, and South Africa. Contact with such movements has been made relatively easy by the cooperation of several Black regimes also committed to liberating Africa's White Redoubt. Zambia and Tanzania, in particular, have provided liberation groups with continuing sanctuary, both for establishing headquarters and for launching guerrilla attacks against neighboring white states. In these

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sanctuaries the Chinese have been allowed to supply weapons and financial aid, and (in Tanzania) training and even some ideological lectures to various revolutionary groups.

6. In the early 1960s the Chinese extended occasional financial aid to a half-dozen national liberation groups. Like other supporters of African liberation, however, the Chinese have found these groups to be difficult to deal with and, with few exceptions, politically unreliable and militarily feckless. As a result, Peking gradually has adopted a tougher, more selective approach. Financial aid has dwindled, and the Chinese have concentrated on providing instructors for guerrilla training camps, supplying modest quantities of arms, and accepting small selected groups for training in China. Groups long accustomed to getting handouts have recently found Chinese officials to be far less generous with funds than with advice for improving discipline, organization, and "revolutionary self-reliance". The Chinese also appear to be seeking a somewhat greater voice in the groups they support -- a tactic which led to strained relations with FRELIMO, the major guerrilla group operating in Mozambique.

7. China's failure to become the dominant patron of African liberation movements is due in large part to the independent

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character of these movements. Although most of the major groups are avowedly pro-socialist, and many of their leaders given to Marxist slogans, they are first of all national movements: foreign support is required, but foreign domination is rejected. They have thus sought and received assistance from a variety of sources, including the USSR, Eastern and Western Europe, Cuba, and the African Liberation Committee of the OAU, as well as from China. This independent attitude is compatible with China's public line that it rejects "great power chauvinism", as well as with its apparent unwillingness to undertake large-scale support and its limited capabilities for doing so. Peking probably does not seek the complete takeover and direction of any liberation group. It prefers instead to continue a long-term role as a supporter of national liberation, ready to provide revolutionary guidance and modest levels of aid to groups seriously engaged in guerrilla activity, even though this allows the Russians to score short-term gains with the liberation movement at Chinese expense.

8. In the early 1960s the loose surveillance over foreigners and the absence of restrictions on their activities in a number of African countries enabled the Chinese to promote dissident groups working against some of the Black African regimes whose revolutionary credentials Peking found wanting. Chou En-Lai gave expression

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to this policy at the end of an African tour in 1964, when he declared "Africa is ripe for revolution today". This was disturbing news for the new Black national leaders, who thought their revolutions had already occurred. During this period China's ill-disguised support to radical dissidents in Kenya, Uganda, Zanzibar, Senegal, Cameroon, and Congo (Kinshasa) had a disastrous impact on China's African relations: several regimes broke off relations and ousted the Chinese, while others -- even among the more radically anti-Western states -- developed an abiding distrust of Chinese Communist intentions.

9. After 1965 such activity rapidly diminished -- in part due to Peking's recognition that revolution was not about to sweep across the African continent, and in part because China's leaders were preoccupied with events at home. Currently the Chinese are not known to be actively working for the overthrow of any Black regimes, with the possible exception of Ethiopia, where they may still be involved in supplying some arms and training to the ELF. While Peking's leaders are reported to be opposed to *coups d'etat*, on the grounds that revolutions "from the top" only spawn more of the same, they seem to be cautiously exploring ways to assist the formation of serious, disciplined cadres of grass-roots revolutionaries to work toward the ultimate overthrow of Congo (K), Burundi,

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and possibly other non-radical Black regimes. Moreover in two states -- Congo (B) and Zanzibar -- the Chinese have been extremely active in building support and gaining influence among stronger and more reliably radical elements within the regimes.

B. Promoting State Relations

The Yellow Barrel: Chinese Aid and Trade

10. Over the past decade Communist China's economic aid commitments to Sub-Saharan Africa[1/] have totalled about $760 million -- over half of all Chinese commitments outside the Communist world, and somewhat above Soviet commitments to the same region. This makes China the fifth largest aid donor[2/] in Black Africa, far below France, the US, and Britain, and about on a par with West Germany. China's aid, however, has been highly concentrated (See Appendix, Table 1): of the dozen Sub-Saharan countries extended Chinese assistance, six account for almost 90 percent and three -- Tanzania, Zambia, and Guinea -- together account for 70 percent.

1/ *Includes Sudan.*

2/ *Excludes international organizations, which have provided more than $2.5 billion.*

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11. The list reads like a roster of Black Africa's radical, leftward-leaning regimes. Indeed, where such a government has later been toppled from power by a less radical regime -- e.g., Ghana and Mali -- the new governments have often terminated Chinese aid. This concentration on Africa's radical states sharply distinguishes Chinese from Soviet aid. Although China's revolutionary puritanism has led to some reluctance to assist ultra-conservative regimes,by far the chief constraint has been the unwillingness of all but a few African countries to accept Chinese aid.

12. China also has been evolving its own distinctive economic aid model, consistent with its revolutionary image and limited aid capabilities. The Chinese advertise it as being the result of their own revolutionary experience, hence more appropriate to poor countries than models conceived in more technologically advanced nations. Their aid carries extremely soft financial terms. It involves a large element of technical and manual aid, and the largest number of projects have been labor-intensive and concentrated in agriculture, civil engineering, and light industry. Chinese technicians work hard, live austerely and seldom mix with local peoples, either socially or to conduct on-the-job

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training. The Chinese seem to have found a low-cost, grass-roots type of aid which will be visible to broad segments of the rural population and not only the urban elite.

13. But not all Chinese aid is low-cost and low-profile. In undertaking to build the Tanzam railway, which will link Zambia's copper belt with the Tanzanian coast 1,100 miles away, Peking has embarked on its first major showcase project in Africa. To cover the Chinese contribution Peking has extended a $400 million, 30-year interest-free credit -- the largest ever extended to the Third World by a Communist country. China's decision to plunge ahead was probably based on its appraisal of the railroad's strategic and political importance rather than its economic potential. Zambia and Tanzania have been by far the leading supporters of the liberation movements directed against southern Africa. The completed road will give Zambia access to the sea through a friendly country, in place of the traditional routes through Rhodesia and Mozambique or through Angola. By thus reducing somewhat Zambia's vulnerability to economic retaliation for its aid to guerrillas operating in the south, the project is expected to contribute directly to the revolutionary, "anti-imperialist struggle". Moreover China's leaders are not unaware of the opportunity the Tanzam affords to score points against the Western powers: China's offer to build the road

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came less than a year after the World Bank had turned it down. But the Tanzam must be viewed as a special exception in Chinese foreign aid practice, and there is no reason to think Peking's leaders are looking about for other expensive projects, or that they intend to raise their aid outlays to a level which would preempt other aid donors in Africa.

14. Communist China's economic aid has not so far led to any marked upsurge in Sino-African trade. Peking still accounts for about 2 percent of Black Africa's global imports, and less than 1 percent of its exports. Only Mali and Guinea conduct substantial shares of their trade with China. Sino-African trade is only slightly more important to the Chinese. Indeed, their only significant economic gain from this trade is a substantial export surplus -- on the order of $50 million a year, most of which represents hard currency earnings. Peking's revolutionary zeal has not prevented its trading with South Africa. This trade, which goes unpublicized because of its political implications, is reported to have run as high as $12 million in some years. (China's trade with Black Africa is shown in Appendix, Table 2).

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Chinese Military Assistance

15. Chinese military aid to Sub-Saharan states has been small and concentrated. In contrast to the USSR, which has distributed more than $150 million of arms aid among 10 Black African countries, Communist China has extended something on the order of $25 million, all but a small part of which has gone to three countries: Tanzania, Congo (B), and Guinea.* In Tanzania, which accounts for about half the total extended, the Chinese program involves constructing a facility for small naval craft, scheduled for completion in mid-1971; a large Chinese training mission for the army; and providing the Tanzanian air wing with at least two squadrons of Migs -- probably Mig-19s -- and corresponding pilot training.

16. All of this will take several years to complete. It is within Tanzania's absorptive capacity, in terms of the operational and maintenance skills which it will require; yet it meets the regime's perceived need for modern air and naval capabilities, particularly for defense against punitive attacks from the white regimes to the south. It is even more important since Tanzania has terminated virtually all military aid from other countries.

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* *Uganda, Ghana, and Mali also have received token quantities of military aid, believed to amount to no more than about a million dollars apiece.*

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In spite of China's monopoly position, however, Nyerere and the general staff appear to be effectively isolating the Chinese from Tanzania's command and intelligence structures, and to be alert to the dangers of Chinese involvement in anything beyond the supply and training role. This appears to be in line with China's notion of its proper role: in particular the Chinese have shown no inclination to be directly involved in Tanzanian or guerrilla hostilities.

China's Diplomatic Successes

17. Since 1969 new Chinese ambassadors have been posted to all but a couple of the African countries which recognize the CPR. The diplomatic initiative has not been limited to the radically-inclined states. The most recent countries to extend formal recognition are Ethiopia, Nigeria, and one of Africa's leading non-starters, Equatorial Guinea. For these countries the establishment of diplomatic and trade-and-aid ties is a painless way to demonstrate their political non-alignment and their independence of the West, as well as to gain a potential new source of foreign aid. For the Chinese it is a chance to regain some of the international esteem which they threw away in the mid-1960s, as well as to win formal recognition and UN votes away from the Taiwan regime.

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Indeed, recently for the first time China's leaders have made pointed expressions of thanks to their UN backers. Peking's new bid for diplomatic recognition has brought the number of tropical African states recognizing the CPR to 15 -- just four short of those recognizing Taiwan.

18. In addition there are two or three African regimes which have been particularly vulnerable to Chinese initiatives and with which the Chinese have established very close and comprehensive state-to-state relations. Tanzania is the most notable example of a country susceptible on several counts to Chinese overtures. Nyerere, its leader, is a dedicated supporter of the national liberation groups which carry out armed attacks against the White Redoubt. With good reason, he fears retaliation by the white states for his support of the guerrillas. Uneasy in having to rely on Portugal's NATO allies for Tanzania's own arms requirements, he turned to the Chinese, who already were involved in support to the guerrillas.

19. Peking's leaders also scored points with Nyerere by offering to rescue the Tanzam project from oblivion. Accepting such aid fitted neatly with Nyerere's notion of pursuing non-alignment and "balancing" Western with Eastern presence in

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Tanzania. On another level, Nyerere was receptive to the Chinese way of doing things: ever eager to find organizational solutions to his country's economic problems, he admires the Chinese organizational ability and work discipline, especially among the peasants, and has expressed the hope that his countrymen can learn from the Chinese example.

20. With two regimes -- Congo (B) and Zanzibar* -- the Chinese have been seeking ties with party, government, and other officials that go far beyond what any but a confused, vulnerable regime would tolerate. On Zanzibar they gained substantial influence among extremist officials of the ruling Revolutionary Council and the militant youth league of the ruling party. Through these officials the Chinese have exerted indirect pressure on the regime to take specific actions (e.g., to close the US Consulate). While such pressures are not known to have influenced government policies, they may have played a part in Zanzibar's decision to terminate Soviet and East German aid activities. President Karume and his immediate advisers are aware of what the Chinese are doing, but so far have done nothing to stop them. Meanwhile Peking has continued to implement an active and effective economic aid program;

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* *Zanzibar, although formally a part of Tanzania, is in fact largely autonomous.*

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indeed, as the last vestiges of Soviet and East German aid programs have been phased out, the Chinese currently are almost alone in providing military aid to Zanzibar.*

21. Similarly in Congo (B) the tensions between President N'gouabi and the more radical political and military leaders impatient with his lack of revolutionary zeal have enabled the Chinese to gain influence among Congo (B)'s party and military elite. Ndalla-Graille, head of the Congo Workers' Party and a leading contender for national leadership in the event of N'gouabi's overthrow, is but one of several important political figures who are strongly pro-Peking. Congo (B)'s army has come under the increasing influence of the Chinese, who currently have assigned 12 officers to teach political ideology as well as military subjects at the officer candidate school. In Brazzaville, as in Zanzibar, tribal and personal rivalries count for more than ideology in national politics; but, in both countries, the Chinese

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* *There also have been reports that the Chinese plan to install a missile-tracking station on Zanzibar. Such reports appear to be without foundation so far. Should the Chinese decide to test-fire a long-range missile into the Indian Ocean, any instrument vessels which might be associated with the shot could make use of friendly ports on Zanzibar and the Tanzanian coast.*

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have taken advantage of existing opportunities to win favor with the radical members of the elite, who they hope will ultimately lead these countries on a disciplined revolutionary path.

III. PROSPECTS

22. Any estimate on long-term Chinese policy is, of course, subject to the uncertainties of speculation on China's leadership after Mao. But certain realities offer useful guidelines to speculation. There will remain distinct limits to Chinese Communist interest in Africa and African interest in Communist China. Neither side has anything fundamental at stake. With possibly one or two exceptions, the African states will continue to be concerned mainly with domestic problems, and their international relations will be dominated by regional African matters and ties to Western Europe. China's primary external interests will continue to lie in its relations with such problem areas as the USSR, the US, Southeast Asia, and Japan. In economic terms, too, the reciprocal interests of Africa and China will remain marginal: neither will be a significant source of the capital goods which each requires, and each region offers a narrow and uncertain market for the other's exports. Within these limits, Sino-African relations will fluctuate in response to shifting needs and priorities on each side.

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23. As in the 1960s, Africa will be an area where, at little risk or cost, China's leadership can cause trouble for US and Soviet interests and enhance its status as a champion of revolution and of the poor countries against the rich. The intensity of its interest in such activity will be, in part, a function of the availability of opportunities elsewhere. A lack of favorable movement in relations with the US or the USSR might lead to more intense activity to turn Black African states against the super powers and to promote the most radical elements within existing Black regimes. Should Chinese relations with countries of major concern become more normalized, however, Peking might be somewhat less interested in Africa generally, and in promoting revolutionary activity in particular.

24. Peking is likely, in any event, to rely more on state-to-state relations than on revolutionary action to enhance its influence in Africa during the 1970s. Provocatory Chinese meddling with radical dissidents, which turned off much of Black Africa in the 1960s, would seem to have an equally bleak future now among the majority of African states which do not recognize the Peking regime. A more moderate course would be even more likely if, as expected, Mao's successors prove to be somewhat

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less interested in promoting world revolution and more concerned with the political and economic problems of the Chinese state and with building its political influence in the UN and elsewhere. This would not however, preclude continuing modest support to national liberation groups active against the white-dominated regimes in the south.

25. Chinese Communist entry to the UN would, of course, provide Peking with additional opportunities to demonstrate solidarity with the objectives of Black Africa. The Chinese would win some Black African applause by supporting resolutions and procedural moves against South Africa, Portugal, and Rhodesia, or in favor of broader African representation in deliberations on the seabeds, disarmament, the Indian Ocean and similar issues. The Chinese might also provide a degree of procedural guidance and focus for the UN activities of the more radical African states, particularly in such bodies as UNCTAD. It is also likely, however, that Peking's representatives would bring dissension to the already divided Black African caucus -- for example, on touchy issues like initiating dialogue with South Africa -- and would incur African hostility by trying to intrude into intra-African deliberations. In short, Sino-African ties at the UN probably would more or less duplicate in microcosm Sino-African relations generally.

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26. In sum, Communist China will continue to be an important source of support for two or three radical African regimes, and will probably expand fairly rapidly its formal ties to a few more Black African states -- Ghana is a likely early prospect. Foreign aid is likely to expand somewhat beyond the low levels of past years, depending mainly on African receptivity and on the opportunities Peking sees for aid to be a useful adjunct in furthering diplomatic initiatives in particular countries. There is no reason to believe, however, that Communist China will seek to become a major source of assistance. Nor is China likely to dominate political or economic events in any African country. China's efforts to expand its influence will be inhibited by tribal frictions, personal ambitions, and local issues which together will continue to dominate African politics during the 1970s. The Chinese will continue, as in the decade past, to learn about Black Africa through trial and error. Temporary successes will be followed by unexpected reverses, while Peking's representatives will continue to seek ways to gain China a more assured place in Black African affairs -- one that will endure beyond the life-span of the typical African government.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 1

COMMUNIST CHINESE ECONOMIC AID COMMITMENTS TO BLACK AFRICA THROUGH 1970

(In millions of current US Dollars)

CAR	4
CONGO (B)	25
GHANA	42
GUINEA	69
KENYA	18
MALI	45
MAURITANIA	5
SOMALIA	23
SUDAN	42
TANZANIA	255
UGANDA	15
ZAMBIA	217
TOTAL	760

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APPENDIX

TABLE 2

CHINESE COMMUNIST TRADE WITH BLACK AFRICA, 1967-1969*

(In millions of current US Dollars)

	Chinese Exports			Chinese Imports		
	1967	1968	1969	1967	1968	1969
CAMEROON	0.9	0.6	1.3	-	-	-
CHAD	0.5	0.4	0.7	-	-	-
CONGO (B)	2.6	1.7	-	-	-	-
CONGO (K)	0.1	-	-	-	-	-
DAHOMEY	1.0	1.4	-	-	-	-
ETHIOPIA	2.2	2.6	2.2	1.0	0.5	0.5
GABON	0.2	-	-	-	-	-
GHANA	0.8	1.6	4.3	0.7	0.6	1.1
IVORY COAST	0.2	0.6	0.7	-	-	-
KENYA	2.5	4.5	3.2	3.1	1.2	1.3
LIBERIA	0.8	-	-	-	-	-
MALI	11.6	9.1	3.1	-	1.1	-
MAURITANIA	1.7	-	-	-	-	-
MAURITIUS	1.1	1.2	-	-	-	-
NIGER	2.7	1.8	-	-	-	-
NIGERIA	17.5	10.4	15.3	2.6	0.7	-
SENEGAL	13.1	5.7	6.7	-	-	-
SIERRA LEONE	1.9	2.3	4.2	-	-	-
SUDAN	17.1	17.2	14.0	17.6	13.9	18.5
TANZANIA	8.7	12.1	11.1	7.7	7.7	10.9
TOGO	2.3	2.2	1.6	-	-	-
UGANDA	2.2	2.9	2.5	4.0	4.9	1.2
ZAMBIA	0.7	1.5	-	8.8	2.4	-
TOTAL	92.4	88.8	70.9	35.5	32.5	33.5
CHINA'S GLOBAL TOTAL	1,915	1,890		1,945	1,820	
BLACK AFRICA'S GLOBAL TOTAL	4,137	4,473		4,260	4,903	

* From African country data. Dash indicates trade nil, negligible or not reported.

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APPENDIX

TABLE 3

COMMUNIST CHINESE NON-MILITARY TECHNICIANS IN BLACK AFRICA, 1970

CONGO (B)	220
GUINEA	400
MALI	400
MAURITANIA	285
SOMALIA	75
TANZANIA	5,200
UGANDA	10
ZAMBIA	300

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